

Safe Schools Lesson Plan:

Teaching Anti-Violence Education Using Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*

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Rationale: Teaching Anti-Violence Education Using Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*

“These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume.”
- *Romeo & Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 6, 9-11

Shakespeare's plays frequently include violence against women or the threat of violence, both in domestic and public settings. High school students regularly read Shakespeare's plays but do not always interrogate the violence that is being presented, nor do teachers always know what to do with these elements when approaching Shakespeare. And yet, within just a few moments of beginning to read *Romeo & Juliet* for the first time, a class will encounter the specter of rape as a Capulet servant named Sampson laughingly threatens to “thrust” the Montague women “to the wall” and take their “maidenheads” (1.1.17-18, 25). Does a teacher ignore this explicit threat of sexualized violence? Or do they draw their students' attention to it and let the lines become a “teachable moment”? Teachers may choose to ignore the violence and sexualized language in Shakespeare, but generally students will not. In my recent practicum, I watched male students laugh together over what they quickly and correctly perceived to be a “rape joke” (above). Thus, students will pick up on this content, regardless of whether or not it is addressed by teachers directly.

The teaching of Shakespeare has a long tradition. Shakespeare plays are embedded into the English curriculum of many schools. And yet, in addition to their literary merit, the plays also provide a valuable opportunity for the teaching of social values and anti-violence education. Students in Grades 9 or 10 may come across gendered, domestic violence between fathers and daughters or husbands and wives in plays such as *R&J* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, while students in Grades 11 and 12 may encounter the unhealthy relationship between Hamlet and

Ophelia (which, in part, leads to her suicide) or the brutal murder of Desdemona by her jealous husband Othello. Teachers may take advantage of the presence of this content to fulfill their mandate of “including violence prevention in the curriculum,” which also involves helping students to develop “social skills and strategies” that they can use in prevention and intervention (TVDSB Safe Schools).

The lesson below may actually be considered more akin to a unit plan as it includes suggestions for multiple places in which anti-violence education can be included. Specifically, the consideration of a teenage girl’s unhealthy romantic relationship and the domestic abuse she experiences at the hands of her father may be woven into the teaching of the play. Not only could educators address specific instances of abuse, but the entire relationship between Juliet and Romeo could also be used to discuss dating violence as well as healthy and unhealthy relationships. My focus below will be on Scene 5 of Act 3, however, in which Juliet’s father physically and verbally attacks her.

This lesson plan is designed for a Grade 10 Academic class using *Romeo & Juliet*, but could easily be adapted for use with a Grade 11 or Grade 12 University class using another Shakespeare play such as *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, or even *Hamlet*.

Lastly, teachers may also want to consider the use of **trigger warnings** with this unit. Members of high school classrooms may have personal experience with violence or rape which could be exacerbated by this type of content. The recognition that victims of violence or sexual abuse may be present in the classroom should encourage teachers to approach these topics with sensitivity and caution as they endeavor to make their classrooms a safe space where students feel comfortable addressing potentially distressing subject matter.

Subject / Course: ENG2D

Grade Level: Grade 10

Strand: Academic English

Time Period: Two 75 minute lessons for Act 3.5 & unit-wide incorporation of the topics

Unit / Lesson Objectives

- Students will interrogate, analyze, and challenge the representation of unhealthy relationships and domestic violence as they read and watch *Romeo & Juliet*.
- During key scenes (1.1, 3.5) students will analyze and discuss the depiction of implied sexual violence and explicit domestic violence.
- Students will make real-life connections as they present relevant information on the topics drawn from contemporary research and statistics in the form of a group presentation assignment.
- Throughout the *R&J* unit, students will pay special attention to the development of an unhealthy relationship between the two main characters, predicated on a history of family violence, isolation, desperation, and fear.

Overall Expectations

- Strand: Reading and Literature Studies
 - Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning
- Strand: Oral Communication
 - Listening to Understand: listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes;
 - Speaking to Communicate: use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes
- Strand: Writing
 - Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Specific Curricular Expectations

- 1.6 Analyzing Texts: Analyze texts in terms of the information, ideas, issues, or themes they explore, examining how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements
- 1.5 Extending Understanding of Text: extend understanding of texts, including increasingly complex texts, by making appropriate connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them
- 2.5 Critical Literacy: Explain how their own beliefs, values, and experiences are revealed in their writing
- 4.2 Interconnected Skills: Identify a variety of skills they have in listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and representing and explain how the skills help them to write more effectively

Unit Assessment – Group Assignment (Assessment For Learning)

Formative Unit Assignment:

- At the beginning of the unit on *R&J*, students will be split up into work-groups of 3-4 and will be allocated time to research topics relating to contemporary issues that appear in the play including: bullying and violence (Capulets vs. Montagues), rape and “rape culture,” domestic abuse, dating violence, and suicide.
- In their groups, students will need to:
 - research their topic using recent sources and statistics;
 - examine their issue’s prevalence, causes, and effects;
 - and connect their topic back to the play, by incorporating and explaining quotations and examples.
- Lastly, groups will need to come up with at least *one strategy or skill to model or explain* to their peers relating to their topic (e.g. strategy for what to do when a friend expresses suicidal ideation).
- Students will synthesize their information into a 10-15 minute presentation which they will present collaboratively to the class.

Formative Learning Goals:

- Group presentations will be scheduled to take place throughout the unit so that students can *repeatedly connect new knowledge gleaned from presentations to the play*. So, for example, after Act 1, the group who has been assigned the topic of rape will present and will connect their analysis of “rape culture” to what we see in Scene 1.
- Students will *discuss and model practical skills and strategies* relating to each of the anti-violence education topics.
- Students will be encouraged to *ask questions and share personal experiences as part of the discussion component after each presentation and thus extend their understanding of the text*.

Summative Learning Goals:

- Within their groups, students will be encouraged to work cooperatively and collaboratively. Students will be encouraged to organize tasks and assign roles.
- Students will practice time-management and will further their research skills using online resources (during class time using laptops, iPhones, etc.) or via library resources (class time will be allowed for this).
- Students will develop their public speaking abilities by presenting to a group. They will also have to field and respond to classmates’ questions.

Domestic Violence in Romeo & Juliet, Act 3, Scene 5 (2 days)

DAY 1 (75 minutes)

Introduction / Hook (5-10 minutes)

(Diagnostic – What do students already know about this topic?)

- Have students write down a definition of “domestic abuse” and engage in a Think/Pair/Share.
- Briefly discuss what domestic abuse is as a class so that students have an accurate definition in mind as they read through Scene 5

Lesson (20 minutes)

- Read through Scene 5. Ask for volunteer readers for each role.
- Pause to explain details, complex vocabulary, figures of speech, etc.
- After each of Lord Capulet’s longer speeches, have students pause and paraphrase what they think he is saying.
- Focus on the following key lines:
 - “...go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church, / Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither”
 - Make sure students understand that Juliet’s father is not only threatening her but is saying he will throw her out of his house if she does not obey him by marrying Paris.
 - “Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch! / I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday, / Or never after look me in the face”
 - Ask students to describe Capulet’s tone and manner in these lines. What do they think his mood is? What emotions is he conveying to Juliet, the Nurse, and Lady Capulet (Juliet’s mother)? Possibly ask students how they would feel if someone were to shout these things at them.
 - “Speak not, reply not, do not answer me; / My fingers itch.”
 - Have students try to paraphrase these two lines. Ask students what they think is meant by the phrase “My fingers itch.” Explain to students that the line is often read as physically threatening – i.e. Capulet’s fingers “itch” to strike his daughter, as he may have already done before.
- Explain to students that in many stage productions, Capulet physically hits Juliet and screams at her (the verbal abuse is clear in the text, but the physical actions are not).
- Play a short clip of the scene from the Franco Zeffirelli or Baz Lurhmann adaptation, in which Capulet attacks Juliet.

Activity 1 (10-15 minutes)

- In pairs or small groups, have students discuss think critically about the scene and do a brief character analysis of Capulet.
- Students will look at the list of questions on the TVDSB website relating “Early Warning Signs of an Abusive Relationship” and will consider them in relation to Juliet and her father.
- Students will consider:
 - Is Juliet in an abusive family relationship?
 - In what ways does Capulet act that are wrong and that constitute mistreatment of his daughter?
 - What strategies might Juliet’s father use *instead* of verbal abuse, anger, and violence?

Activity 2 (30 minutes)

- Play the PSA “It Ends Where it Begins” for students (2-3 minutes)
- The PSA ends with the words “Now Change How it Starts.” Ask students to think about this statement and then to take the rest of the class to re-write the second half of the scene (from the point at which Capulet enters) using alternative dialogue and coping strategies.

DAY 2

Activity 2 Continued... (20 minutes)

- Remind students of what you were discussing last class and of the script re-write they were working on. Allow students a few minutes to finish up or review their work.
- Have students present their re-written scripts. Some students may choose to act out their scene, while other students may just summarize some of the important changes they made.
- Write a list on the blackboard of strategies / methods / conflict-management ideas that students were able to incorporate into their re-written scenes in order to avoid unnecessary anger and abusive behavior.

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

- Have students briefly return to the TVSDB website on “Relationship Violence” (either online or using printed handouts) and read the section on “Supporting the Victim” and “Supporting the Abuser.”
- Have students brainstorm ways in which students would talk to Juliet about the behavior and ways in which they would talk to Juliet’s father about the behavior.

Consolidation / Conclusion

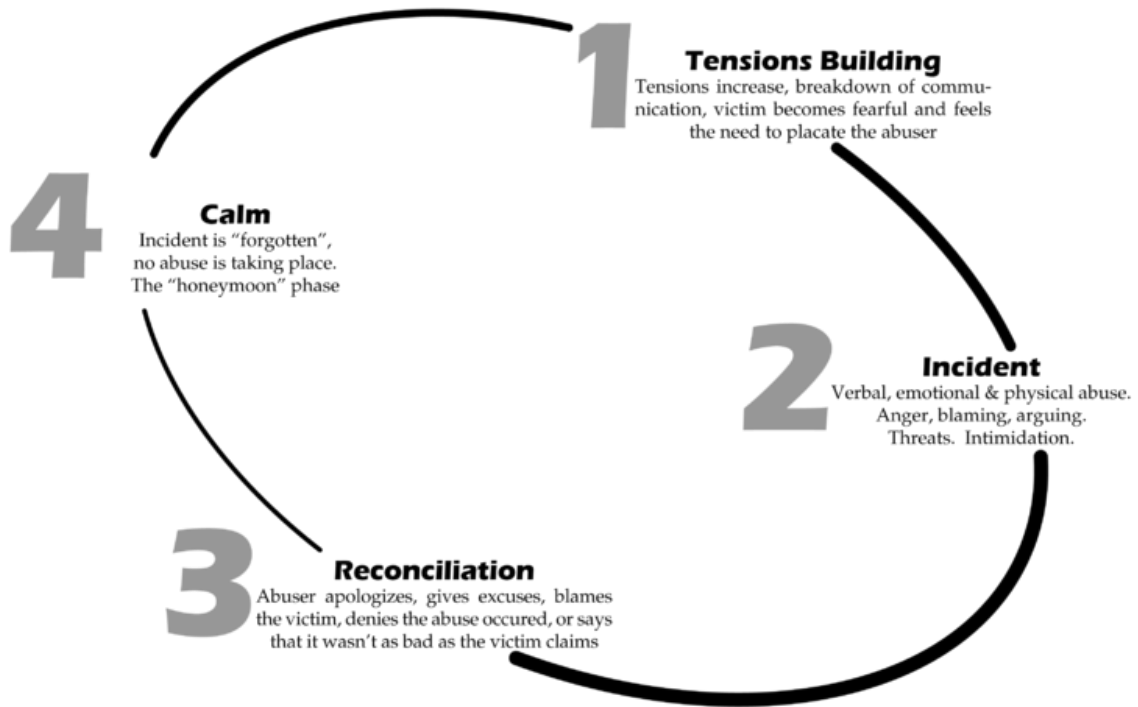
- As the class moves ahead with reading the play, asks students to keep Juliet’s relationship with her father in mind and to reflect on it in relation to Juliet’s relationship with her boyfriend / husband Romeo.
- Show students the “Cycles of Violence” image (Appendix A) and ask them to think about how it fits the scene they’ve just read and to consider whether it fits any other event(s) in the play as they continue forward.

References & Resources

- ADVA - Against Domestic Violence and Abuse in Devon. (n.d.) *Is This Love? Domestic Abuse Educational Resource*. *Devon County Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.devon.gov.uk/adva-education-pack.pdf>
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Appendix A

Cycle of Abuse



Appendix B: Printed Handout (Source: TVDSB Website)

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE INFORMATION

Early Warning Signs Of An Abusive Relationship

Have you ever felt scared of his/her temper?

Do you need to justify everything you do, everywhere you go, and everyone you see to avoid his/her anger?

Are you afraid to disagree?

Have you been kept away from family and friends?

Do you feel embarrassed in front of others by his/her words or actions?

Have you ever been hit, pushed, grabbed, kicked, and/or shoved?

Are you criticized for how you look, talk or dress?

Do you stay because you feel you can change or help him/her?

Are you forced into unwanted sexual activity?

Is he/she jealous and often accuses you of flirting with others?

Does he/she make threats to get his/her own way?

Does your partner blame you when she/he becomes angry?

Do you feel that you have to "walk on eggshells" so she/he won't get mad?

Are you afraid to say no to your partner?

Has your partner thrown things at you?

Does your partner make fun of something that you feel vulnerable about?

Do you believe that he/she is jealous because he/she loves you so much?

Do you feel you cannot tell anyone because no one will believe you?

Early Warning Signs Indicating That You Are Abusive

Do you have a quick temper?

Have you ever threatened your partner to get what you want?

Have you ever thrown or broken things in anger in front of your partner?

Are you jealous if she/he spends time with others?

Do you criticize your partner's appearance?

Do you become angry if she/he has different thoughts or feeling than you do?

Do you need to know where she/he is and with whom?

Do you become abusive or violent only when you are drinking or using drugs?

Have you ever threatened that you will harm her/his friend or pet?

Have you ever forced your partner to perform sexually?

Have you ever suggested that you might hurt yourself or commit suicide if she/he broke up with you ?

Do you tease or make fun of your partner about the way she/he talks or looks in front of others?

Do you call your partner derogatory names?

Do you tell your partner that she/he is too sensitive when she/he gets upset at something that you have done or said?

Do you feel your partner makes you angry?

Does your partner seem afraid of you?

Do you make most of the decisions?

Have you ever made fun of your partner in front of others?

Have you ever tried to make your partner feel guilty in order to get what you want?
Have you ever shoved, kicked, hit or punched your partner?
Have you ever caused bruises?
Have you ever broken or taken something out of spite that she/he treasures?

SUPPORTING THE VICTIM

Listen without criticizing

Show concern but don't be confrontational.

Be patient. She/he may deny the abuse out of embarrassment or fear, but criticism will only further alienate the victim.

Offer help but do not take control. Your goal is to empower the teen to make wise and safe choices.

Concentrate on his/her strengths to increase feelings of self-worth.

Be honest. Discuss the limits of confidentiality up front so that she/he knows under exactly what conditions you will involve other people, including parents, school, or police.

Don't victim blame.

Criticize only the abusive behaviour, not the abuser. The victim will feel forced to defend the person she/he cares about and will not trust you to help.

Continue your support even if she/he chooses to stay in the abusive relationship. When she/he is ready to think about leaving, she/he will be more likely to seek your help.

Continue to support even if the victim returns to an abusive relationship.

Ask how she/he feels; don't tell him/her how he/she feels or should feel.

Be aware of your own "baggage". Don't bring your issues to the victim's relationship.

Be sensitive to cultural differences and realize that not everyone will share your values.

Provide information about relationship abuse. Give numbers and names of community resources that can help.

Encourage him/her to share situation with family or caregivers.

SUPPORTING THE ABUSER

Identify the abuse when you see it but remember to criticize the behaviour, not the person, or you will only succeed in making him/her defensive.

Educate the abuser about the different types of abuse.

Help them to realize the consequences of abusive behaviour.

Take time to acknowledge the abuser's strengths. Put-downs only reinforce the insecurity that is often at the root of the abuse.

Be clear that violence is always a choice.

Acknowledge that it takes courage to talk about abuse and seek help to end abuse.

Offer your support if she/he chooses to seek help.

Help the abuser to accept responsibility for the abuse.

Violence does not happen because one is "provoked" or "drunk". Violence is used to gain power over another.

Be aware of minimizing, denial and shifting blame.

Never tell an abuser anything his/her partner has told you.

Don't give up. Behaviour change takes a long time.

(Adapted from Teen Relationship Workbook, Wellness Reproductions and Publishing Inc., 2001)